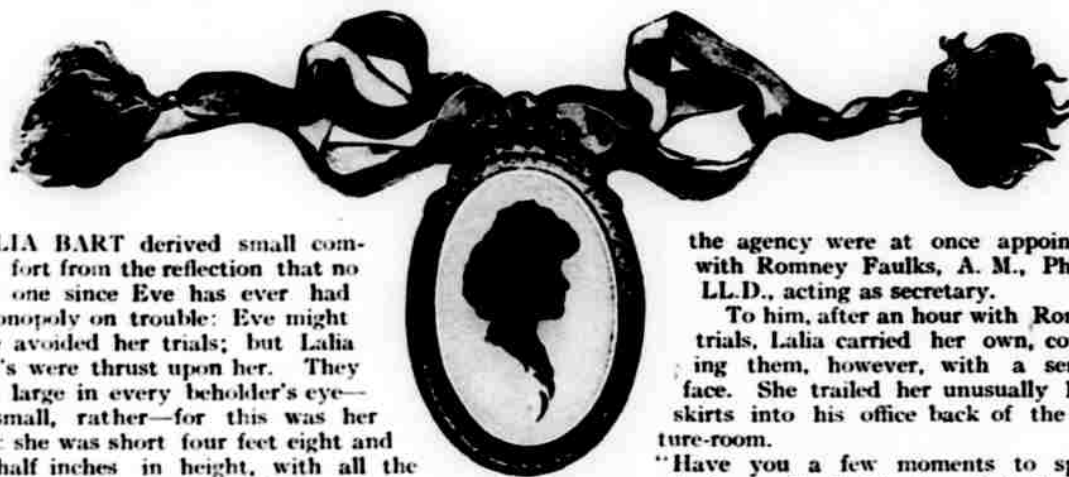


THE MINIATURE LADY

Problems That Confronted an Aspiring but Diminutive School-Teacher

By ALICE LOUISE LEE



LALIA BART derived small comfort from the reflection that no one since Eve has ever had a monopoly on trouble: Eve might have avoided her trials; but Lalia Bart's were thrust upon her. They were large in every beholder's eye—or small, rather—for this was her trial: she was short four feet eight and one-half inches in height, with all the feelings and dignity belonging to five feet eight and a half.

She longed to sweep through the college halls; she could only trip. She desired to appear commanding; she had to stand on tiptoe in a crowd to avoid being smothered. She hated to be petted: the feminine portion of her friends persistently petted her—the masculine portion wished to.

"She is the sweetest, daintiest little lady you ever saw," the girls of Alpha Gamma wrote home in her freshman year, "and we are so glad that we've rushed her into our 'sorority'! Alpha Gamma feels rich in getting her."

She was popular with the men of the college also, for the institution was co-educational.

"Of course there is no question about inviting the miniature lady!" they would say to each other in the discussion previous to any social function. "She is a gay little brick, and the thing would not be complete without her."

In her senior year the girls of Alpha Gamma mourned. "What shall we do without her advice next year?" asked the juniors despairingly.

"And her plans for fun?" wailed the sophomores.

"And her dear lovely ways?" soberly from the freshmen.

"Every one loves you, Lalia," cried Belle Gilbert, an Alpha Gamma senior. "You are so popular and bright! Oh, dear! I wish I was like you!"

"Yes, four feet eight and stubby!" scornfully from Lalia. "If wishes were horses, in this case you'd have a desperately uncomfortable one to ride." And the little woman gathered up her books for the "Hill," on whose windy top the college stood.

At the vestibule door she paused. "We are seniors now, Belle, and you'll find that your height has a commercial value when you get out in the 'Arenar.'" The last word was in imitation of the college chancellor, who was an Eastern man prone to add an R where it was convenient.

To fully one-half of the senior young women the "Arenar" meant the teachers' world. Temporarily or permanently, over half of college women become teachers. To such a position Lalia Bart was looking forward eagerly. She had her plans already laid. She would have a platform built in her class-room, wherever that might be, of extra height. And on that platform she would stand and rule. Ah, yes! give her half a chance and she could become a commander. Unconsciously, Lalia strained her diminutive figure until her head would have just covered the four feet eight and one-half mark.

She was going to a lecture which she particularly enjoyed, and after the lecture she intended to interview the lecturer. The lecture was on the causes of the fall of Rome, and the lecturer was Professor Romney Faulks, who, being young and broad-shouldered, had recently been put in charge of a new department in the college, namely, a teachers' agency for the seniors.

This teachers' agency was a brilliant idea of the chancellor's, who reasoned thus to his faculty: "We have alumni scattered all over this land who are teachers, principals in preparatory schools and school trustees. Now why not invite them to serve their *alma mater* to the extent of giving our own graduates a first chance in their schools?"

"Surely," agreed the faculty, and members of

the agency were at once appointed, with Romney Faulks, A. M., Ph.D., LL.D., acting as secretary.

To him, after an hour with Rome's trials, Lalia carried her own, covering them, however, with a serene face. She trailed her unusually long skirts into his office back of the lecture-room.

"Have you a few moments to spare me, Professor Faulks?" she asked in her five feet eight dignity which set so sweetly and quaintly on four feet eight.

"Indeed, I have, Miss Bart," said Romney, pulling out a big office chair for her. On second thought he pushed back the big chair, and pulled a little wicker rocker into place.

Lalia saw the change and sighed gently. It all belonged to her peculiar trial.

"Please don't tell me, Miss Bart, that you will require me to produce one of the agency blanks. Spare me that blow!" began the young professor, laughing. "Ask me to recommend you to a library position or a—"

"Yes," said Lalia emphatically, "a what? That's just it. Teaching is all an ordinary college course prepares a woman for."

Professor Faulks opened his mouth suddenly, and closed it as quickly without speaking; but he smiled, and at the smile Lalia's head was lifted a trifle higher. They both had attended numerous little luncheons lately down in the city given in honor of senior engagements. Lalia had attended college to fit herself to teach, to command, not to become engaged—and obey. Hence the obstinate tilt of her head.

"It's an agency blank I'm after," she said, "and recommendations and all the rest of the necessary evils attendant on getting a position."

Romney, who understood the tip of the girl's head, laughed aloud and opened the desk at which

he sat. He drew out a long sheet of paper, selected a pen, and with mischief lurking in his downcast eyes, proceeded to write.

"I presume you know," he began hesitatingly, "that the questions are printed here on the sheet and are not of my own making. I simply write in the answers. The queries are a bit—well—inquisitive."

"Do they begin at the disease which carried off my grandfather?" asked Lalia, smiling.

Romney laughed. "No, they are along the line of assurance, not insurance. They go no further back than your age."

"Twenty-five," easily from Lalia.

Romney's pen refused to work. He looked at the little, smooth, fair, pink-checked face and tiny figure and said awkwardly: "Let's write it down twenty."

"You don't believe me!" flashed Lalia. "Do not write it twenty. I'm twenty-five."

Romney bit his pen. "Of course, Miss Bart, I believe you; but who else would?"

"I know it's my misfortune," said Lalia humbly, playing with her muff, "to appear childish. I'm very sorry."

Romney left off chewing his pen. "It's something that few women would grieve over, I fancy," he said, a queer expression in his eyes. "I know of no malady cured so quickly as youth," and he wrote: "Twenty-five."

"Your height?" he went on trying to act business-like.

Lalia pulled at the ribbon on her muff and said slowly: "Four feet, eight and one-half inches." Then anxiously, as Romney wrote: "Are you putting in the half inch?"

Romney choked and nodded.

"And will you add," Lalia went on slowly: "She appears taller?"

Romney's head dropped lower over the paper. "Suppose," he murmured, "the principal to whom this is sent reads that and then sees you? What would I be likely to get?"

Lalia looked out over the city, and her face was filled with real trouble, which surprised Professor Faulks. He, in common with the majority who knew her, never thought of trouble in connection with her happy ways.

After one glance, he hurriedly wrote down her words, and asked the next question: "What experience in teaching have you had?"

"None," said Lalia simply. "I want to get some."

Romney's mustache twitched a trifle as he wrote down half her reply.

"Now, it's customary," he began with a lapse into awkwardness, "for each applicant to leave their photograph with us to send out to different schools along with our recommendations."

Lalia drew a card out of her muff. "I knew that, and so came prepared."

Romney took the photograph and studied it: a sweet, delicately rounded face with infantile lines which contradicted the womanly eyes; hair piled high on the head and fluffed about the brows; the roundest of little throats, with a big fur laid around the shoulders.

Romney gazed in delight—and in despair. The man in him revolved over the picture; as secretary in a business scheme he groaned inwardly. It would be difficult to make her see why such a photograph would not find favor with principals.

"Miss Bart," he finally exclaimed bluntly, "will you not put on one of your—well, we'll say the dress you have on, and—and make yourself look as old as you can, and fix your face so it will look—well, ahem!—sort of 'teacherified,' and then sit for your portrait? Forgive the suggestion, Miss Bart. Of course all this is just business, and I want you to stand a chance of getting a position."

But Lalia was not offended. "Of course," she said, "it's just business, and I understand better now, than I did before even, how I am my worst enemy in securing a position."

She held out her hand for the offending photograph; but Professor Faulks laid it in a drawer on top of a dozen more, saying half carelessly: "Perhaps I had better keep it here until you bring another, in case I should want to use it."

Four days later, Lalia presented herself at his office door. She had left her hat and coat in the



"You Have Won Him Already," Said Romney

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